

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 45

SEPTEMBER 4th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,—

In the latest of the remarkable series of speeches in which the Prime Minister has both expressed and fortified the resolution of the country he reminded us that if four months ago the disasters which fell on the allied cause could have been foreseen, it would have seemed incredible that this country could have survived—still more, that it should be stronger both in confidence and in fact than ever before. No religious mind can experience such happenings without a deepened sense of a Providence over-ruling human affairs. They encourage us to believe that there may be some great task in history which our nation may be called to fulfil. Such a hope may nerve our endeavour but it is no ground for pride. It must fill us rather with humility and fear—humility, if in spite of the crying evils and injustices of our own society we are permitted to be the instrument of a divine purpose, and fear, lest we fail in the task entrusted to us. We need to be driven to prayer that, as the Prime Minister said, we may not be found unworthy of victory, if after toil and tribulation it is granted to us.

There is further ground for thankfulness that the first steps have been taken to redress the wrong, injustice and cruelty done to many aliens friendly to us and to our cause. Major Cazalet expressed the feelings of many when he said in the debate in the House of Commons that he would not feel happy either as an Englishman or as a supporter of the Government until this bespeckled page of our history had been rewritten. I will return to the subject next week. In the meantime let me recommend to you an admirable leaflet\* containing a reprint of an article in the *Evening Standard* under the challenging title "Why not lock up General de Gaulle?", a reproduction of the Low cartoon mentioned in "C.N.-L." No. 40, and a quotation from J. B. Priestley.

## CHRISTIANITY AND NATIONALISM IN JAPAN

By action of the House of Bishops of the Nippon Sei Kokwai, the Church founded by the work of the Anglican and American Episcopal missions, the three English bishops and three American bishops have been asked to resign their sees. Steps are being taken by various Christian denominations to eliminate all foreign personnel. It is proposed, according to a telegram in *The Times*, to amalgamate the different denominations in a new Church to be called the Genuine Christian Church in Japan. It is natural in a time of national tension that the Church in any country should wish to assert its freedom from foreign control and influence, and the measures taken to this end may in times of excitement be pushed to extremes.

But behind this lies a serious threat to the essential nature of Christianity. It is reported that a religious bill is now being drafted which will require all creeds in Japan to fit into the framework of the new national structure. These events in Japan, which are the culminating phase of a struggle that has been going on for a long time, are a fresh reminder of the conflict throughout the world between the universalism of Christianity and

\* Published by Raymond Gauntlet, 10, Gerald Road, London, S.W.1. No charge, but contributions to cost of circulation welcomed.



the religion of nationalism. The issues involved are among the gravest that concern mankind.

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

In Letter No. 41 I promised that when I got back from my holiday I would do my best to meet the challenge that the News-Letter should give a more definite lead. This week's supplement is meant to be a beginning. Some of you may feel that what is said is too general and for that reason not what you were looking for. But I am convinced that, if we really believed these things and lived by them, the effect would be revolutionary in our own lives and in our environment, and I also hope in succeeding issues of the news-letter to follow out some of the practical applications for which there was no room in this supplement.

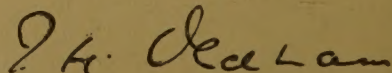
But if I undertake to do all I can to point the way—not, of course, out of my own resources but by drawing on help from many sources and especially from our members—I must also make it clear that there are certain expectations that the News-Letter cannot fulfil, because they are illegitimate.

In the first place, there are some answers to the question, What can I do? that the News-Letter cannot give, and it is your business to find out for yourselves. The concrete situations in which action has to be taken are endlessly varied. The readers of the News-Letter include clergy and ministers, teachers of all grades, politicians, administrators, social workers, civil servants, employers, work-people, persons of leisure and other classes, who are much more competent than the Editor to judge what ought to be done in their respective spheres. It is for you to strike out and experiment. If you will let us know what you are doing or tell us about important bits of work that come under your observation, the News-Letter, as far as its limited space permits, will pass the information on.

Secondly, we need to remind ourselves that our questions are sometimes wrong questions or asked in a wrong way. The question, What can we do? may spring from a pure desire to serve God; but there may also lurk in it an irreligious demand. It may include an element of human impatience, a desire for immediate deliverance from a situation that seems intolerable. But if the diagnosis in the supplement is true, there can be no quick way out of a psychological and sociological situation that is the growth of centuries. We must be content to know that we are moving in the true direction, to do God's will in the present and to leave the future in His hands. There is no Christian experience of life in which the quality of patience has not a large place. The Christian attitude is expressed in the prayer that "we may do Thy work, and bear Thy cross, *and bide Thy time*, and see Thy glory."

The Supplement by the Archbishop of York (C.N.-L. No. 41) has been so much appreciated that our stock is sold out, despite the printing of 23,000 copies. We are reprinting to meet the extra orders, and will have a small reserve for those who apply promptly.

Yours sincerely,



**Subscriptions.**—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. (\$3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.



SEPTEMBER 4th, 1940

## THE WAY OUT

Men and women of good-will weighed down by the present tragedy are everywhere asking the question, What can we do? There is an immediate answer, true as far as it goes: human needs cry out on every side, tackle the job that lies nearest to hand. But no merely concrete answer meets the real difficulty. What people want is to be assured that any particular task that they may undertake has real significance. Is it going to make any genuine and lasting difference? What is desired is a clue to the total tragic situation of society which will give a satisfying meaning to the acts which they perform.

This very question, we are told in St. John's Gospel, was addressed to Jesus. "What shall we do?" the people asked him, "that we may work the works of God?" "This is the work of God," was his reply, "that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent." This profound answer has an extraordinary relevance to the present situation.

The gravity of what is happening in the life of mankind is that the forces of death seem to be sweeping everything before them. The dynamism of the Nazi and Fascist movements and of the all-engulfing militarism characteristic of them is, as acute observers saw even before the war, a drive towards death. Most of Europe and a large part of Asia and Africa have been drawn into the maelstrom of destruction.

What power can evoke the superabundant energies of life that can stem and vanquish these forces of death? The answer is—faith. There is no greater thing than any of us can do than to believe with our whole being in Life—in God, the infinite Source and Giver of Life. This central act of faith is the fountain from which all else will flow. As men in their hearts believe, so is the world which they are able to create or to which they have to submit.

To believe in Life is not simply to believe in an impersonal vital energy. It is to believe in the life of Spirit, because God is a Spirit and man, created in the divine image, is called to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. The crucial question for the future is what we believe about the nature and end of man.

Any answer to the question, What can we do? that is not merely fortuitous must be based on a true diagnosis of the situation. It has from the beginning been the contention of the news-letter that, while the proximate cause of the war is the unrestrained will to power and desire for domination of the Nazis, the deeper causes are evils common to our civilisation as a whole.

### THE ROOT OF THE EVIL

The fundamental evil, I suggest, is that man has become divorced from the true sources of his being. The root cause of all our troubles is the boundless egoism of the isolated self. The individual has wanted to be free from all bonds. He has claimed to live his own life in his own way, and to shape the world in accordance with what he himself judges right. This individualism is a fundamental denial of man's true nature—not merely of what he ought to be but what he is. In his essential nature man is a dependent being. He is dependent for his existence on nature, on his fellow-men and on God. Only in acknowledgment of this dependence can we become our true selves.

If this is true, we have the clue which will lead us in the long last out of the labyrinth. Our task is to recover in experience the knowledge of man's dependence. It will call for much patience and self-discipline. A false view of man has entrenched itself deep in our consciousness. It determines the climate which we breathe. It has shaped our political and economic institutions. It has bound us with the cords of habit. Only by a long and painful effort can we win our way back to health. But if we know the road that we must travel, we know that every step along it brings us nearer our goal. We have a measure by which we can judge the activities in which we should engage.

### MAN'S DEPENDENCE ON NATURE

One of the significant tendencies of to-day is that we are seeing more clearly the evils of a wrong attitude towards the material world and of the divorce of our urbanised



society from direct contact with the primary sources of its life in physical nature. The separation has given a false bias to the whole of modern life and deprived masses of men of the discipline and education which come from intimate association with the processes of nature.

"I feel," writes one of the readers of the news-letter, "that we have lost some simple and elementary clue to human living. My personal experience is that our elementary values are just hopelessly wrong. Emancipate man from the control which used to be exerted by nature and he goes mad."

Another, who is an engineer in the Midlands, writes: "It seems to me to be true that in times of great stress the human mind turns again to Mother Earth, and the best means of forgetting our troubles for a while and of that replenishment of spirit so necessary is to get to work on the land. Personally I feel that, if I could not spend my spare time in the works necessary to keep a large garden in good order, I should soon be a wreck."

The lessons which man learns from nature—to a large extent subconsciously through a host of almost unnoticed impressions and responses—are many. Supreme among them is the necessity of obedience. Nature will not be compelled; her laws must be faithfully observed and unquestioningly obeyed.

Not only has there been impoverishment of individual lives through loss of contact with the physical basis of human life but, as was shown in the Supplement to Letter No. 35, the whole world economy has become perverted and brought to a dangerous pass. Modern man, dazzled by his new powers, set out to make himself lord of the world. He has looked on the world of things only as material to be exploited for his pleasure or profit. It has been forgotten that each manifestation of nature, each variety of material, has its own character, virtue, quality and beauty, deserving man's veneration and love. The earth has been scoured for more and more material to meet the insatiable demands of factories. The result has been over wide areas an exhaustion of the resources of the earth and of the possibilities of the soil on which the whole life of mankind depends. The religious error of forgetfulness of man's dependence on nature and of lack of reverence towards it is now producing grave economic consequences. These facts, like the war, give a wholly modern meaning to the Biblical assertion that the wages of sin is death.

The criticism has been made of the widely

appreciated Supplement by the Archbishop of York (Letter No. 41) that he laid too unqualified stress on "equal access to raw materials and equal opportunities of developing resources." The quarrel is not with the emphasis on equality, but on the absence of a caution about the perils of too much access and too much development.

#### — ON HIS FELLOW-MEN

In his determination to enjoy to the full the infinite possibilities of the enlarged world opened up by modern discovery, science and invention, the individual has come to view the whole world as a means to the expansion of his personal self, and has forgotten his essential and inescapable dependence on his fellows. This attitude is not altered by the fact that the individual often finds that he can achieve his purposes most successfully through co-operation with others.

A sharp contrast is often made, more particularly in Nazi literature, between the "I" and the "We" attitude, and the latter extolled as higher and more satisfying. But unless we recognise the highly ambiguous attitude of what is called the "We" attitude, we shall be seriously misled. It may mean one or other of two totally different and opposed things. The "We" may be, and very often is, nothing more than an enlarged and fortified "I." Men seek to escape from their conscious weakness and their doubts about their own validity by identifying themselves with the purposes of a group. Its manifestly greater power enhances their individual sense of worth.

Man's true relation to his fellows is something very different. True community is a relation between persons who preserve their independence and refuse to merge their identity. It belongs to its essence that the persons who form the community remain separate and distinct. Hence there is always present in it the element of tension and contradiction. Love transcends the contradiction and makes it the basis of a richer harmony but it does not remove it. To take away the contradiction of separate personalities is to destroy community and create the dreariness and loneliness of a world in which there is only a solitary self and no fellowship between persons. This is what happens when dominating parents make the whole family centre round themselves, or teachers seek to impose their own pattern on the children under their influence. One outlook, one will dominates the whole, and fellowship is destroyed. There cannot be fellowship except where there are



two or more independent centres of thought and will—two or more persons, each respecting the individuality of the other and making no claim to have the final and absolute word. The same thing is true of community between groups and nations.

Community is a set of relationships in which persons *limit* one another; a state in which men are bound together in mutual obligations and responsibilities. When we encounter another person, the endless expansion of our individual self in our efforts to understand, appropriate and master the world receives a check. A person is something that we cannot bend to our own purposes; another will encounter our own, an independent existence that has a claim to exist and assert itself equal to our own.

This world of persons in which separate individuals cross one another's paths and make demands on one another is the sphere in which the truly human qualities develop. We become selves only in relation to other selves; only by receiving from and giving to other persons. The qualities required for living rightly in this world of persons are very different from the characteristic temper of the modern world. To live with other men we need to listen to what they say. They make claims on us to which we have to respond, and the response may take us far from our self-chosen course. To endure the contradiction of purposes other than our own calls for much patience; it involves suffering. Yet it is through such contradictions and conflicts that we grow to our true stature. Those who seek to escape from them to an untroubled life of contemplation, to the security of scientific understanding, to the pursuit of technical mastery, to undisturbed enjoyment, do not know what real life is. They have lost their lives in seeking to save them.

The Christian view of man, as Professor Brunner has impressively shown in his volume *Man in Revolt* (Lutterworth Press, 15s.) finds the *essence* of humanity not in man's rational nature, nor in his power to create, but in his capacity for community and his fulfilment of responsibility. Only in loving is he truly man.

Modern man has largely lost an understanding of this truth of his essential being. He has sought the fulfilment of his life in an unrestrained individualism, not in the responsibilities of community. The evil admits of no speedy remedy, since it affects not only individual lives but has infected and perverted the structure of society. The natural communities which provided a traditional system of mutual obligations and responsibilities have been to

a large extent broken up, and the life of family, in particular, which is the supreme training ground for a life of responsibility is suffering serious decay. No change from one political or economic system to another can ever restore social health until men learn afresh within the limited circle of their own experience the meaning of their responsibility for one another. An essential part of our task is to foster the growth of forms of community in which men are bound together in mutual obligation and learn from life itself their dependence on one another.

#### —AND ON GOD

Man's dependence on nature and on his fellow-men derives ultimately from his dependence on God—from the fact that he is a being created for fellowship with God. The universe is sacramental because it is God's garment. Nature demands our reverence because it is God's creation. Our fellow-men can make on us an unconditional demand—the claim, for example, that we should lay down our lives for their sake—only because the claim is in the name of something more than their individual existence. We can love another human being with our whole selves only because there is in him or her something that is more than mortal.

The Christian view of man is that what makes him distinctively human is the fact that God speaks to him, calls him, lays on him a commission. That this truth is for many of us difficult to grasp is evidence how far our minds have moved away from an understanding of the Christian faith. Yet unless this is true, what real hope is there for mankind? What ground is there for believing in his capacity to control the blind forces of nature and to create order out of chaos unless he is related to a God who is Spirit? What is the alternative to the Christian view that men are called to live in the world as God's sons—to experience His mercy and goodness and to perform His works.

Put in theological language, the Christian assertion—the most important assertion that could conceivably be made—is that *man has his being in the Word of God*. That may seem at first a forbidding and not easily intelligible statement. It is, however, only another way of saying that what makes man man is that he is related as a person to Being who responds to persons in a personal way. The Word, or speech, is the means by which persons communicate with one another. Man is man because—incredible as it may seem to our unspiritual and darkened minds



—God says to him: “I have created you, I have loved you. I have forgiven you. I will supply your need. I want you to co-operate in carrying out my purposes. I ask for your trust. I ask for your obedience.”

This is far from being merely a question of personal religion. If the essential nature of man consists in his relation to God, everything must go wrong when that essential relation is denied or perverted. The denial of the truth of man's nature has affected the whole structure of modern society. Both capitalism and Marxism assert the primacy not of the spiritual but of the economic. Nazism and Fascism assert the primacy of the national State organised for military purposes. They are all alike bound to produce evil and misery because they are a violation of the true nature of man. The only real cure for the evils of society is a return to the truth that man is a spiritual being and that the spiritual is primary. John Buchan wrote in his autobiography which has just been published (*Memory Hold-the-Door*. Hodder and Stoughton. 12s. 6d.): “I believe—and this is my crowning optimism—that the challenge with which we are now faced may restore to us that manly humility which alone gives power. It may bring us back to God.”

While man's ultimate dependence is on a God who transcends both nature and society, it is through our dependence on nature and our fellow-men that we grow into a knowledge of our dependence on God. God is present everywhere, but never apart from

other presences. It is in, with and under these other presences that we come into contact with Him. It is for this reason that throughout the New Testament the love of God and the love of man are inseparably linked. Only in loving men can we show our love to God.

It is thus through a direct and fearless response to life as it meets us from day to day that we come to know God and to learn our dependence on Him. Life itself, if we trust it, is our salvation. We have to accept life as it comes to us; accept ourselves, our weaknesses, our fears. We have to let go the evasions and rationalisations which we have built up to protect us against reality. Only through a complete surrender to reality can we become free men.

This attitude to life is possible because of our faith that life, as we actually experience it, comes from the hand of a loving God. What is sent is sent for our good. In each situation, however trying and perplexing, there is something that God would have us do. In each situation God says to us, “My strength is sufficient for thee.” Life is thus an adventure lived co-operatively with God.

I have failed to convey my meaning if I have not made it clear that what has been said concerns not the intellect alone but the deepest springs of life and action. We have to *live* our way back to individual and social health. There is no other road to recovery.

J. H. O.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET,  
DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.